



BILL FINCH
Mayor

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
CITY OF BRIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT
999 BROAD STREET
BRIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT 06604
TELEPHONE (203) 576-7201
FAX (203) 576-3913

TESTIMONY OF THE CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
TO THE
EDUCATION COMMITTEE
Monday, March 16th 2008

RE: SB 6654, AN ACT ESTABLISHING A RESIDENT TEACHER CERTIFICATE.

Members of the Education Committee

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of the bill before you today, which would allow the State Board of Education to establish a resident teacher certificate. My support for this legislation comes from my deep belief in the work of Teach For America. Passage of this bill is essential to the continued presence of Teach For America, a program that benefits our state's neediest children, in Connecticut. Therefore, it is critical for you to act.

I believe that the state needs to do all that it can to attract to the teaching profession qualified people who are dedicated to raising student achievement. Through Teach For America, many talented teachers have entered classrooms in my district – and I couldn't be more thankful. Whenever I visit a classroom taught by a Teach For America teacher, I see, first-hand, what the research has proven: Teach For America teachers are driving their students toward high levels of achievement.

A growing body of research shows that Teach For America corps members have an exceptionally positive impact on their students' achievement. A longitudinal study published by the Urban Institute in 2008 found that high school students taught by Teach For America teachers excelled compared to their peers; in fact, the incremental impact of having a Teach For America teacher was three times the incremental impact of having a teacher with even three or more years of experience. A 2004 study by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. found that students of Teach For America teachers in elementary classrooms make more progress in a year in both reading and math than would typically be expected. And data from a 2008 study of Louisiana's teacher education programs by their Board of Regents indicate that participants in their state's Practitioner Teacher Program – the majority of whom are Teach For America corps members – are having an exceptionally positive impact on their students' achievement in mathematics, reading and language arts. Study participants effected greater gains in these core subject areas than both new and veteran teachers with two or more years of experience. It is worth noting that the statutory framework that supports this Practitioner Teacher Program mirrors the framework that the Resident Teacher Certificate proposal is putting forward.

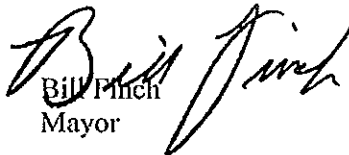
There is no doubt in my mind that Teach For America teachers are making real differences in the lives of our students. We are truly fortunate to have so many of them

working in our school districts, and it is of great concern to me that Teach For America's future in Connecticut is uncertain. Connecticut currently grants Teach For America corps members a 90-day grace period to become fully certified. If the Connecticut Department of Education proceeds with its ill-considered plan to remove the ability of Teach For America to use the 90-day grace period, it is a real possibility that Teach For America will not be able to operate in our state. We could avoid that terrible fate by adopting this Resident Teacher Certificate bill.

The legislation before you today would enable the State Board of Education to establish a resident teacher certificate, which would allow Teach For America teachers in Connecticut to earn their initial certificate over the course of a year. Other states where Teach For America places teachers already operate in this fashion. New York, for example, offers a "transitional B" license that allows teachers who have completed an orientation program and passed two state tests to complete their training over the course of three years. Connecticut competes with New York for talented teachers, and if we do not establish a resident teacher certificate, we are in danger of losing great teachers who want to teach in our state's highest-need urban districts.

Thank you, again, for giving me this opportunity to address this important issue. I urge you to adopt the bill before you today, for the sake of our neediest students in Connecticut and in support of programs that enable them to live up to their full potential.

Sincere thanks for your attention,


Bill Finch
Mayor